



ASIA-PACIFIC COALITION FOR EAST TIMOR

STATEMENT

On the First Anniversary of
the Asia-Pacific Coalition
for East Timor (APCET)

A year ago today, the Filipino people showed the world what international solidarity is all about.

East Timor, the tiny, yet oil-rich unabashedly Catholic nation that was brutally annexed by neighboring Indonesia only days after it declared its independence from Portugal, was the subject of an international conference in Manila.

The Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor, or APCET as it was widely known then, pushed through despite intense pressure from the Suharto government in Indonesia and its ally Philippine President Fidel Ramos, to scuttle it.

The Filipino people, through the APCET convenors, organizers, participants, media, church and even some elements within the bueracracy itself, stood firm in the eyeball confrontation with Suharto and Ramos. We did not waver nor flinch in the confrontation to uphold not only the issue of East Timor but also our own human rights.

Even for awhile, APCET once again highlighted the Filipino people's passion and commitment to human rights and civil liberties.

APCET created history. APCET was history.

It clearly showed that the interests of South peoples are always interrelated and complementary, as in this case: the East Timorese right to self-determination vis the Filipino people's right to zealously defend their right to assembly and expression.

Most telling, APCET brought into the mainstream the agenda, nay, the relevance of people-to-people solidarity particularly among populations of the so-called South.

APCET was also a first experience of its kind and scale of South-South solidarity. Never before have we been witness or participants to a campaign cum solidarity effort initiated and sustained by South peoples for another South people.



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Thus it is essential that we proceed to develop solidarity relations not only for the East Timorese but also for the peoples of Burma, Sri Lanka, the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Bosnia, the Middle East and the countless other struggles even as we pursue our own local battles.

Ironically, our advocacy for East Timor last year forged a fresh basis for unity, albeit fleetingly, among bickering progressive groups.

Perhaps it is efforts like this that may help engender a truly dynamic peoples movement hereabouts and that will foster a new internationale. And perhaps in the process efforts like this will help liberate our respective peoples.

It is in efforts like this that we tend to rediscover ourselves.

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